

PORTLAND AFOOT

*PDX's 10-minute newsmagazine
about buses, bikes & low-car life*

November 2011:

THE WEDGE ISSUE



*the opposition plays rough ... **bike-and-riding** takes off ... **bus mom** has enough ... **late-night crime**, mapped ... **uphill pedaling**, app'd*



1

Ride strike

A load of late-night Hillsboro bus riders **turned tables on a TriMet driver** who refused to drive until Magdalena Rabadan, 21, could stop the wailing from her daughter Jessica, 2, or get off the #57 mid-trip. Rabadan slunk away – and several riders apparently **disembarked in protest**.

WHY IT MATTERS

"I can't imagine I'm the only one," Rabadan told KATU Oct. 6. Nope. Of 12 riders on a #57 the next week, one said **the same happened to him and his son** last winter. The 34-year-old dad blamed driver stress. "There's nothing but tension on this bus."

DRIVER KEEPS HER JOB

<http://pdx.be/BusBaby>

2

Good news

Two years in the making, **TriMet's new online trip planner** launched Oct. 15 at RTP.trimet.org. It'll plot routes to other districts like C-Tran and SMART and even figure out the easiest or fastest way to **bring a bike on your trip** – or tell you when a bike alone is better. "Not even Google" can offer that, said mastermind Bibiana McHugh. Next up: an app that tells you which book makes you look smartest on the MAX.

HOW BIKE ROUTING WORKS

<http://pdx.be/TheBestRoute>

3

Midnight knife

Jennifer Poston, 22, was propping open a Yellow Line door a few minutes after midnight at the Rose Quarter Oct. 16, waiting for someone, when Andy Bloomstrom, 30, yelled angrily at her. Poston allegedly **stabbed him**

three times, left him bleeding and got back on the train, *The Oregonian* reported. He'll be OK; TriMet said it'll again step up police on MAX. Crime per rider remains near historic lows.

WHERE ASSAULTS HAPPEN

<http://pdx.be/PdxCrimeMap>

4

Sweet bike cage

A year ago, Sunset Transit Center's \$275,000 bike cage replaced 8 car spots with 74 bike hooks, but it's **never held more than 11 bikes at once**. Oops! So why is usage soaring at Beaverton TC's cage, which charges the same 30¢ a day, after just 3 months? It's all about **access to comfortable bike streets**, westside transpo expert Heather McCarey said Oct. 24. Food for thought as PDX eyes a new \$400,000 cage at Gateway. 

HOW TO GET CAGE ACCESS

<http://pdx.be/BikeAndRide>

New leaf.

Street Talk has had a good run, but it's time to try something new over there on the right. A commuting tip of the month?

The best TriMet missed connections from Craigslist? An intense interview with a bus rider? Maybe a rotation? Tell michael@portlandafot.org.

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Have some yam with that.

Street Talk

Five questions and someone worth asking

Last January, Elly Blue **sat down with her dogeared dayplanner** to review 2010 page by page. She got as far as June before resolving to make a radical change to her working life: she scaled back to **only four gigs**.



Today Blue, 33, **writes a biking column** for *Grist.org*, publishes **feminist bike zine** Taking the Lane, joins **speaking tours of the West** and runs *PDX by Bike*, an **info service for bike tourists**. She decelerated into *Sweetpea Baking* last month to talk **economics, books and the brainy side of bikes**.

Why can bikes save the economy?

Because they're cheap.

Elly Blue
bicycle writer

money for the individual, but it saves even more money for we the people – the taxpayers. One estimate is \$3,000 per vehicle per year. But I think it's actually more than that when you consider that we spend 4 percent of our national budget just on treating diabetes patients through Medicare.

How'd you get into bikes?

In fall 2004 I went on a Midnight Mystery Ride. A van that said "2 wheels bad, 4 wheels good" kidnapped one of the bikers and our mission was that we had to go find this person. We met at the Alibi and then there was a big dance party under the Fremont Bridge.

Who are your own favorite bike writers these days?

I'm reading *One Less Car* by Zack Furness, looking at movements like Critical Mass and the effect they've had on policy. Just got my copy of Amy Walker's *On Bicycles*. And a feminist bike zine in Minneapolis, *Dames on Frames*.

I want to hear your rant about the Internet.

The Internet and car transportation are having a really similar effect on civil society. All these daily interactions with people don't involve looking them in the eye. There's no accountability, so people just go after each other.

What's your favorite Portland secret?

11th Avenue through Northeast. That's the way to go. Track Blue's rapid movements (and get the drop on future Midnight Mystery Rides) at pdx.be/BikeWriter. 

Division chief

You've never heard of Ward Hubbell. But he's already been persuading your leaders to hit the brakes on building new sidewalks and bikeways – by splitting the votes of green politicians and turning his opponents against each other. And his past is even more interesting.

Portland's cozy network of "active transportation" activists had never seen anything quite like it.

It was a warm August morning, and the city council chambers were packed. One after another, sidewalk advocates took the stand urging the city not to spend \$2 million on a downtown bikesharing service. One after another, bicycling advocates took the stand urging the city not to spend \$1.3 million on sidewalks for Barbur Boulevard.

It was an unprecedented split in a political coalition accustomed to sharing lobbyists and locking steps.

And in a regional transportation budget of \$400 million, it was a fight "over crumbs," sighed Marianne Fitzgerald of Southwest Neighborhoods, one of those who spoke, unsuccessfully, for sidewalks and against bikesharing.

The bikes-versus-sidewalks fight, last August, was a twist of fate. The size of the crumbs was anything but.

It was, in fact, the first victory of a little-noticed Portland nonprofit launched in 2010 with a simple goal: Redirecting public money from biking and walking toward helping freight trucks reach highways.

Its name: "Building the Economy through Sustainable Transportation." Its founder: a local public affairs specialist named Ward Hubbell.

Carlotta Collette was confused.

It was late 2010, and the elected Metro councillor was chairing a task force assigned to decide how Portland and its suburbs should be told to spend an allowance of federal transportation grants.

In a hard-fought vote that summer, a Metro committee had voted 7-6 for cities to spend 75% of the money on "active transportation" and 25% on "green economy" projects.

At the time, BikePortland.org reported that a local freight advocacy group called BEST was a main backer of the "green economy" provision.

But what did "green economy" mean? Collette said that early in the debate, BEST had circulated a "pretty smart proposal": a vision she said emphasized "green tech and green jobs."

She referred to the proposal as "the green memo" because, she said, it had been printed on green paper.

But once the meetings started, an odd thing happened: Hans Bernard, BEST's man on the task force, acted as if "green economy" simply meant "freight."

"Any notion that it should be about green jobs and green economy kind of disappeared," Collette said last month, still wondering why BEST had changed its tune. "They weren't even defending it."

Nine months later, acting on the task force's new guidelines, the City of Portland agreed to spend \$2.4 million, 26% of the federal allowance, on a freight

intersection near N Lombard Street. Metro expects to approve it, along with the bikesharing project, Dec. 15.

For details, see pdx.be/GreenEconomy.

Hubbell, who hired Bernard to lead BEST last year, said in an interview that he loves active transportation, but that Portland's already got plenty of it.

"If you're going to say we want to be Copenhagen and we want 40 percent of the population to bike to work, well good on you, good luck, God bless," Hubbell said. "I don't think it's going to happen."

He said companies that rely on urban freight such as Fred Meyer, Schnitzer Steel and Columbia Sportswear have been happy to back the lobbying effort. BEST asked firms to pay \$2,500 to \$10,000 a year, depending on revenue.

For those watching closely, the mid 2000s were a precarious time to be a vinyl manufacturer.

Low interest rates were juicing a seemingly bottomless construction boom. For an industry that draws 76 percent of its revenue from the building sector, the news should have been terrific.

But something unusual was happening in this boom: consumers were suddenly asking about "green building," thanks in part to a new set of standards called LEED. And some vinyl executives feared they might be in LEED's crosshairs.

"They were worried," recalls Don Loepp, editor of *Plastics Today*. "They know that there are environmental groups like Greenpeace that would like to see vinyl banned."

A new class of green architects was circulating studies of cancer rates near vinyl factories. The industry watched nervously as LEED weighed a proposal to reward projects for avoiding vinyl.

Enter Ward Hubbell of Portland, Ore.

A 44-year-old Mississippi preacher's son with a master's in psychology and a gift for gab, Hubbell had been an up-and-coming vice president for corporate affairs at timber giant Louisiana Pacific when he made the mistake of falling in love with

the city of its corporate headquarters. LP left Portland for Nashville in 2003; Hubbell decided that to stay in town, he'd have to create a job of his own.

So, Hubbell said in an interview last month, he started calling timber, vinyl and other executives with a proposal: He would launch a nonprofit to license and promote Green Globes, a new green building standard that would compete with LEED.

A seat on the board of Hubbell's new "Green Building Initiative" would cost \$20,000 to \$100,000 a year, depending on a firm's revenue. Today, GBI's dozens of sponsors include the Vinyl Institute, Dow Chemical and Louisiana Pacific.

Green Globes has decided not to reward buildings for avoiding vinyl.

The project gave Hubbell foes around the country. See pdx.be/Hubbell for comments and his responses.

"He is a professional lobbyist who is fronting a green building association as part of his work for his industry clients," says Jay Coalson, CEO of Green Building Services, a major Portland firm deeply invested in the LEED standard.

"He's basically a professional astroturfer," says Lloyd Alter, green building editor for the blog Treehugger.

Hubbell says Coalson is threatened by Green Globes because it is cheaper than LEED. Green Globes lets clients invest money in a building rather than a plaque on its wall, he said.

"Monopolies tend to benefit the monopolist only," says Hubbell.

(non)profit margins

As the Green Building Initiative's income has shrunk, the fees it pays to Hubbell's five-person PR firm have swelled from 22% to 42% of the nonprofit's budget.

More on his pay: pdx.be/MarketRate

"Competition drives down prices. It improves product quality."

As a green building standard, Green Globes never took off. It's certified 400 buildings, Hubbell says; LEED boasts of 7,674 U.S. projects. GBI revenue has dwindled (see right).

But GBI's critics claim Hubbell's goal was never to create a permanent product. It was to divide potential green building supporters and paint declining practices "green."

"It's a slowdown," said Coalson. "The more you can slow it down, the longer people can go without having to actually change the way they do their business." 

2006

\$747,940

2007

\$814,462

2008

\$709,156

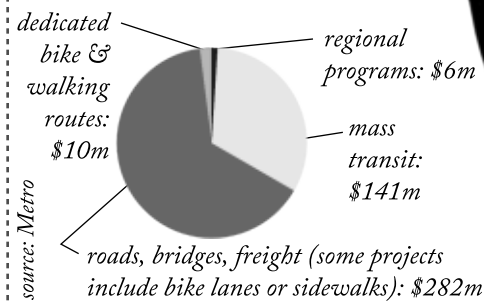
2009

\$629,733

source: guidestar.org

Too little for trucks?

average annual PDX-area transpo spending, 1995-2010



Hubbell said BEST is searching for every penny available for freight. With a coming \$450 million fight for cash to widen the I-5 bridge, they may need it.

"How sustainable is it for trucks to line up for 10 miles here idling in traffic?" said Hubbell. "And how sustainable is it for businesses to move out of the state because they can't move stuff?"

As for the phrase "green economy," he said, it "wasn't a term we came up with."

"I probably would have called it 'freight,'" Hubbell said, smiling. "But that's just me. I'm not a real fancy guy." 

photos by
Michael Schoenholtz

ONLY ON THE BUS



Scott

TriMet #15

This goes clear back to when the bus in our neighborhood was called the 53. We were in our 20s. This is before the kids, almost 30 years ago.

We been here only a couple of years. That's part of it. Neither of us had lived in a place where we used a bus.

So this guy gets on the bus. He's a big guy. Not just tall – he was big. Like, a Chicago guy.

There are two bars running down the side of the bus, right? And after he gets on he reaches up and slaps one hand on one of the bars and slaps the other hand on the other.

Big guy.

And he announces to the whole bus: "I KNOW WHAT TIME IT IS."

For a moment it was sort of tense. Like, *it's time for me to BUST YOUR HEAD.*

"TIME FOR ME TO GET" – and there was a little bit

of a pause – "DOWWN TOWWN."

Just like that. "DOWWN TOWWN."

And then he sits down. It's just where he was going, you know?

It was time for him to get downtown.

I think we laughed a little bit. This is one of those things that goes into your brain when you're fairly young and stays there. You remember music and funny things your friends said. Not that they don't say funny things any more. We just don't remember them.

Anyway, from then on, when Ellen or I heard somebody say, "I know what time it is," one of us would say "It's time for me to

get DOWWN TOWWN."

The kids, I think they never knew why. I mean, they hadn't actually been there.

It could have been alcohol or mental illness. But you know, you never know about that stuff. It could have just been a big guy with a sense of humor. In that case, yes, he would probably enjoy that 30 years later this couple he ran into is still laughing about it.

I think people that stand up in buses and make announcements, they kind of expect to be remembered.

As told to editor Michael Andersen. What's your favorite bus story? Write onlyonthebus@portlandafot.org. Storytellers get a gift card to our favorite café. ☕

This guy wasn't just tall – he was big.
Like, a Chicago guy.

Electronic mail.

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